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# Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Musical Examination

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Eastern Kentucky University

Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Musical Examination

Honors Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Requirements of HON 420  
Spring 2017

by  
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Faculty Mentor  
Dr. Timothy Smit  
Department of History

## Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Musical Examination

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Dr. Timothy Smit, Department of History

Eleanor of Aquitaine lived from c.1124 to 1204. In that time, she was the wife of two kings, a mother to three kings, a patron of the arts, and the heir to, and perhaps primary ruling force of, an area that is the equivalent to nearly half of modern France. Her life, full of both personal and political intrigue, has been the subject of several artistic works, ranging from poetry to film. While the proliferation of media has been beneficial in maintaining her memory in the intervening centuries, it has also contributed to a wealth of misinformation about her life. This mythologization, though fascinating, has seeped into historical study, influencing both her biographers and those whose research simply encounters her. As media can help create experiences which last in both individual and collective memory, a scholarly creative work focusing on a specific person or event could lead to greater historical understanding by not only those considered scholars, but also the general public. The purpose of this creative project is to exist as a historically-accurate, scholarly narrative of Eleanor of Aquitaine's life, particularly as her background of education, governance, and relationships led her to revolt with her sons against Henry II. This musical work describes her background, focuses specifically on the Revolt of 1173-1174, and ends with an analysis of the importance of Eleanor beyond the period of her life.

*Keywords and phrases:* honors thesis, medieval history, folk opera, media, narrative history, Revolt of 1173-74

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## Acknowledgements

For an undertaking of this magnitude, there are several individuals to whom I am extremely grateful. First, I would like to thank my thesis mentor, Dr. Timothy Smit, for guidance and resources throughout the project and pointin me to a path which yielded far more fruitful material when I hit initial roadblocks and stumbling points through the process. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Cynthia Resor for the study abroad trip on “Modern Myth and Historical Reality” that introduced me to Eleanor of Aquitaine and partially inspired this honors thesis, the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity for awakening an interest in the ways media affects education and understanding, as well as the multiple honors faculty who continually create a home for academic exploration and excellence at Eastern Kentucky University.

I would also like to thank my many friends for their support of, and encouragement through, this year-long endeavor. While most were intimidated by the magnitude and workload of what I aimed to accomplish, all were crucial in keeping me focused, motivated, and excited for this project by offering opinions, listening to my brainstorming, and bringing me coffee – something that may deserve an acknowledgement in its own right. Finally, I would like to thank my family for fostering an environment of boundless curiosity for, and limitless exploration of, the world, its past, and its possibilities throughout my life. Without such a loving base, I would never have considered this thesis as a possibility.

From late December 2015 into early January 2016, I studied abroad through CCSA to London, England, and Dublin, Ireland in a class taught by ECU professor Dr. Resor. This study abroad focused on the difference between commonly known modern myths and the less accepted historical reality. While the class focused on the medieval period in England and Ireland rather generally, I wanted to apply these ideas in a far more specific manner. I was introduced to the story of Eleanor of Aquitaine first at Dover Castle, hearing about the turmoil of her rebellion with her sons against her husband – their father – Henry II of England. Upon looking more into her life because of personal curiosity, I realized that she was most well-known, if known at all, through fictitious artworks of various media. As such, I saw the opportunity to produce a scholarly, historically-accurate creative work as my honors thesis.

The choice to deliver this creative thesis through original lyrics and music composition was not a random choice. Since I took a music theory course in high school and heard of Finale Notepad, I have been fascinated with writing my own music, and I

have done so on many occasions for classes, organizational involvement, and my own amusement. Combined with a hobby of writing lyrics, a passion for history, and fondness for obscure musical styles, a medieval rock opera was a natural form of media to choose. As Richard I also reportedly composed music while imprisoned, as exhibited in the song “Ja Nuns Hons Pris,” the choice of artform created a natural link with the period of study.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, the telling of Eleanor’s story through lyrical and musical art fits with the troubadour tradition with which she is associated. Literary and cultural scholars reflecting on the period often connect her and her court to the idea of courtly love in medieval France and England, a phrase with multiple potential interpretations. Among this same group of scholars, there exists some debate as to the veracity of courtly love as an existing literary movement. Detractors claim that courtly love, being a term invented during the Victorian period, is not fully grounded in historical fact like other terms, such as “knight,” “noble,” or “feudalism.” Instead, “it is a term used for a number of different, in some cases contradictory, conceptions; and as such, it gives the illusion of communication without the reality.”<sup>2</sup>

While a skeptical view may be beneficial in evaluating some claims, there is evidence that some living at the time identified this genre as it emerged. Andreas Capellanus, for example, wrote *De Amore*, which translates to *About Love*, in the Twelfth Century, making him a contemporary of Eleanor who was, as indicated by letters,

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<sup>1</sup> “Ja Nus Hons Pris by Owain Phyfe,” YouTube video, 4:31, posted by “Cocalin,” Apr. 30 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMZ3mSVcSKg>. The recording featured in the video is by Owain Phyfe and is on his 1999 album, *Poets, Bards, and Singers of Song*. In this song, the singer, representing Richard I, laments through his perceived betrayal by those around him while imprisoned.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Moore, “Courtly Love’: A Problem of Terminology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 4 (1979): 630.

connected to the court of Marie de Champagne.<sup>3</sup> While a few modern scholars have viewed this work as satirical and condemning of courtly love, others identify it as either proof of the movement or a balanced evaluation thereof.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the intent was, *De Amore* can not only serve evidence that those in the Middle Ages were aware of the trend in court literature, but also provide examples of the perceived and identifiable rules of love in its contemporary literature. Despite some of the generalizations reified since it was named as a literary tradition during the Victorian Era, it is most universally recognized as the idealization by a poet of his beloved, using exalted, deified language.<sup>5</sup>

Eleanor of Aquitaine, though not recorded as having produced any poetry or art herself, is known as having been a patron of the arts, advancing troubadour poetry through giving artists a platform through which they could speak, and inspiring the creation of different works. Women in court, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, and their influence – particularly in the written arts – might have influenced the depiction of strong women in literature, particularly those with political power, such as in Arthurian legend.<sup>6</sup> While the fact that several powerful women in these and likewise legends were witches or evil might indicate an inherent belief that women do not belong in positions of power, their depiction in these lasting, fictional accounts is still indicative of the power they held, both in terms of art and reality.

Beyond simply wanting to create a work of art, I realized there was a need for research on this topic, as well as several benefits for its presentation in an artistic manner.

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<sup>3</sup> Don Alfred Monson, *Andreas Capellanus, Scholasticism, and the Courtly Tradition* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, "Courtly Love," 622, 629.

<sup>6</sup> Fiona Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth's British Epic and Reflections of Empress Matilda," *Arthuriana* 8, no. 4 (1998), 85.



One of the benefits to this particular form of presentation is its ability to communicate historical truth in an accessible way to bring back to life a period long past.

History is often taught as a series of dates in chronological order without real regard for context.<sup>7</sup> This has led to the Middle Ages being often glossed over – if covered at all – in discussions as a mystical land full of superstition, not as a key part of the human story with ramifications into the present.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, the conceptions people have about the medieval period – whether adequately historically influenced or not – are strong, and they are reinforced by fictional works based upon the period, often dubious in historical accuracy and ranging from *Braveheart* and *Game of Thrones*, to Shakespeare and *Lord of the Rings*, to *Brave* and *How to Train Your Dragon*.

Due to the dearth of information about many specific parts of Eleanor's life and mannerisms, any attempt to depict her in a fictional account requires a bit of conjecture on the part of the author; however, her life is filled with intrigue to the point that there is little need to fictionalize where historical accuracy provides sufficient framework. In other words, the historical truth of Eleanor's life is equal to or greater than, in captivating an audience, as any fictionalized account could be.

Popular media, particularly period narratives, are the primary avenues through which twenty-first century audiences access history and are potentially invaluable tools to those hoping to encourage historical awareness and thought.<sup>9</sup> Media and memory are inextricably connected. Scholars have analyzed the complex relationship between the two, especially since the 1990s and particularly in relation to the effects mass media has

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Alan Metzger, "Magna Carta: Teaching Medieval Topics for Historical Significance," *The History Teacher* 43, no. 3 (2010): 349.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>9</sup> Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 1.

on individuals' experiences in the world.<sup>10</sup> Applicable to understanding both reactions to modern news and understanding of past events, audiences increasingly view media portrayals of events as more "authentic" and traditional historical portrayals, such as nonfiction books and academic articles, as "constructed."<sup>11</sup> In other words, narrative media portrayals create a believable, engaging, and sometimes shared experience for audience members, but those same audience members perceive traditional history as "created by the winners," unengaging, and sometimes inaccessible. Whether or not the popular view is accurate, it remains the *popular* view; while historians and self-proclaimed "history buffs" might engage with traditional forms of historical media, more individuals are far more likely to accept popular media as historically factual enough, meaning that the mythologizations are more likely to be understood as fact.

While the entertainment and education markets are rife with opportunities to use historical accuracy and popular media to increase understanding of, and engagement with, different periods, the resulting mediation of history has not often taken advantage of these possibilities. Not only would a fictional, but historically accurate, account allow the audience an accurate account of Eleanor's life, it would also allow viewers and listeners the opportunity to understand period culture and its effects and influence more thoroughly through a created and shared experience. As she was a very well-connected woman who knew a lot of information and a lot of people, any depiction of her life must involve the depiction and characterization of many others who surrounded her – as friends, family, enemies, or all of the above. Through effective use of media, the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 20.

distinction between “Modern Myth and Historical Reality” can be made clearer for many figures in Eleanor’s life, not just Eleanor herself.

Figures in history are often mythologized, both close to and long after their period of existence. This conversion of history into story is often motivated by social and political forces. One period example of this treatment is that of Robin Hood – a figure of whom there are no definite written tales before 1377– who, though popularly depicted as a hero to the poor and aide to Richard Lionhearted, was likely a fictional amalgamation of various folk tales, representation of historical figures, and personification of common hopes.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, figures such as Eleanor of Aquitaine have been known primarily through completely fictional or potentially dubious accounts.

The multitude of stories about Eleanor of Aquitaine, many of which are false, have repeatedly and often been considered as fact, or at least assumed to be truthful enough as to not warrant fact checks or correction for many years.<sup>13</sup> These stories range from warrior stories and sexual dalliances to consanguinity and maltreatment of mistresses.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have deemed these half-truths and untruths to be part of a Black Legend – stories that demonize Eleanor as a witch and murderer – or a Golden Myth – stories that portray her as a proto-feminist heroine in a period with little female empowerment.<sup>15</sup> Neither of these views is wholly accurate.<sup>16</sup> Instead, both perpetuate a false dichotomy which refuses to acknowledge the validity of the middle ground, the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Morsberger, “In Quest of Robin Hood,” *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 25, no. 3 (1971): 75-76.

<sup>13</sup> Frank McMinn Chambers, “Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine,” *Speculum* 16, no. 4 (1941): 459.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 460-462.

<sup>15</sup> Michael R. Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014): 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

plane where historical truth likely exists, wherein Eleanor is neither heroized nor villainized but imagined complexly.

In the case of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the split between mythologization and reality has not been the most clearly defined. In artistic media, she has been the frequent focus of several types of art and works thereof, ranging from drama and books to poetry by Tennyson and *The Lion in Winter* with Katherine Hepburn. Often, these focus on events either completely fictionalized or real events which have been sensationalized. As these fictional renditions of her life have not often been treated with interest in historical truth, they perpetuate significant mythologization of Eleanor's life.

The breadth of artworks has, in several cases, influenced historical study. While there has been significant recent interest in Eleanor as a subject of inquiry, she, for many years, suffered limited treatment from biographers save for those which furthered fictional viewpoints.<sup>17</sup> The black legend and golden myth were perpetuated by both her contemporaries and those writing accounts in years afterward, so the lack of solid evidence and dearth of accessible primary sources makes it easy for artists of various types to make up information. As such, these become main sources, though they probably should not, for various groups, even bleeding into the historical field.

While previous attempts have been made to free Eleanor, so to speak, from her legends, they have been met with difficulties. Some historians have argued that this is an impossible task for two main reasons: first, women were often portrayed unfavorably, if at all by chroniclers, and, second and more importantly, she "cannot be detached completely from her legend, for the simple reason that it is only because of this legend

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<sup>17</sup> H.G. Richardson, "Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *The English Historical Review* 25, no. 3 (1971): 193.

that we know of her.”<sup>18</sup> The primary issue with the disparate mythoi is the pendulum effect between legend and myth which swings from one end to the other based on the whim of culture. In more conservative periods, the black legend prevailed. In more liberal periods of study, such as the 1970s where vast amounts of content about her was published, the golden myth dominated. In reality, she likely existed in a middle ground.

In creating a work of art that was historically accurate, I wanted to be sure I did so in an appropriate form, remaining true to period music but doing an appropriate modernization of it in order to attract a wide audience. One inspiration for this process is the popular musical, *Hamilton*. Beginning as a result of composer, lyricist, and actor Lin-Manuel Miranda reading a copy of Ron Chernow’s *Alexander Hamilton*, *Hamilton* is a modern rap musical which has been highly acclaimed since its off-Broadway premiere.<sup>19</sup> While many creative liberties were taken in the creation of the musical, the musical stands out as one of the more historically accurate musicals, and artistic works in general, in terms of events portrayed and personalities depicted. This is partially because Miranda wished to appeal to historians and those concerned with accuracy in the creation of his work, but it is also because he believed the story of Alexander Hamilton to be strong enough without significant alteration. While Miranda’s background of work writing jingles and doing paperwork for various political campaigns in his early life piqued his interest in the technical aspects of Hamilton’s character and allowed him the energy to read primary sources to get a better understanding of Hamilton, his love of American hip-hop informed his understanding of Hamilton as a character, noting similarities with the

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Flori, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Rebel*, trans. Olive Classe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>.

late Tupac Shakur in their similar focus on social change and inability to resist a verbal sparring match.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar vein, Eleanor of Aquitaine lends herself quite handily to a semi-theatrical, musical adaptation focused on historical accuracy to appeal to both avid learners and casual listeners alike. While Eleanor has been immortalized in art far more often than Hamilton, she has yet to be portrayed in an audio-visual manner that would specifically appeal to the historically conscious listener or viewer. While Hamilton's life could be easily fit into the hip-hop genre, Eleanor of Aquitaine requires a different approach. The story of her life is epic in its impressiveness, greatness, and impact; therefore, the story of her life should be an epic: a long poem – or series thereof – in an elevated tone which shows her and her actions as significant to English history, much like a hero in historically-based epic was shown to have influenced the course of history of his homeland.<sup>21</sup>

As such, I wished to use music that would evoke images of epic tales and historical heroes. For this purpose, I focused on using medieval music and music that the general public tends to think of as medieval or epic period music. While my intention was originally to use all medieval-inspired music for the songs, many of the songs I listened to and studied seemed to be rather repetitive and simple. To add variety, challenge, and excitement, both for me as composer and the audience as listener, the criteria for influence expanded greatly. The resulting music can claim a large body of music for inspiration. These genre influences include lots of Renaissance, Classical, folk, musical

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 7-11.

theatre, and film score qualities, some of which stand out more in different sections of the creative piece. The result is a stylistically diverse group of songs which work together to create a musically united whole.

While the resulting collection of songs is strong, there were two primary limitations in the process. The first limitation was time. Though one year is a significant amount of time to create a quality project, the scale of the music and lyrics had to be reduced to allow the argument of the piece to be adequately sourced and the quality of the resulting project to be well-reached. The second limitation was due to the music composition software. I chose to use Finale Notepad as the composition software for two primary reasons: I am familiar with it, having used it for previous projects many times before, and it is one of the best, user-friendly, free music composition software easily available.

The main limitations were the limited types of instruments available, meaning there is no period-accurate lute option, and the limited numbers of instruments per piece, being a total of eight staves – lines of music – per page. Additionally, this limitation means that the notation is not wholly accurate to the vision of the final product, and further instruction would be required for those performing the pieces. For example, on percussion notation, notes with “x” on the head are intended to be a snare or higher-pitched drum, and notes traditionally notated without the “x” are intended to be a bass or lower-pitched drum. For performance, there would be more instruments, and the music would be arranged so that the parts of each instrument were in their respective ranges. As written, the euphonium, for example, is standing in for all brass instruments, and the oboe is representing all woodwinds.

The original intention for this creative project – and what it will likely become with time beyond the scope of honors thesis – was for it to be a medieval folk rock opera. The only limiting factors in pursuing this goal were the limited instrument options in composition software and, more than anything, time. While the concept and structure of this project were influenced by *Hamilton* and the tradition of epic poetry, the music was meant to be in the vein, musically, of groups such as Sabaton, Nightwish, Eluveitie, and Blackmore's Night. In essence, it was to be a concept album. Despite the lack of traditional rock instruments, such as drum set and electric guitar, rhythmic patterns – as in strumming – and chord progressions inspired from symphonic metal and folk rock manifested themselves within the final thesis project.

While the music itself might be characterized by technical historical accuracy, it was a sacrifice that needed to be made to increase the options for creativity and create broader audience appeal. Moreover, the audience appeal through greater variation allows the focus of the audience to focus on the arc of the story and historical accuracy of the rest of the work. Most importantly, the preliminary success and appeal of the project even before the completion of the projects supports the belief that drove the inception of this project; the acclaim and spark of questions created by this project in friends and strangers alike indicates that a historically accurate performance based on Eleanor of Aquitaine would not only introduce modern audiences to a figure and period of which they know little, but also contribute to the body of artistic works based upon her in a historically *sound* matter.

While I was confident from the very beginning of the process that I wished to write a musical work on Eleanor of Aquitaine, the process of narrowing for the creative



project was rather difficult as there are far fewer guidelines than for a traditional research paper. As such, understanding the scope of the themes, forms, and the ways in which they would complement each other proved to be a difficult task. I began by focusing on Eleanor's life alone, but I then narrowed this focus to just Eleanor and her sons rebelling against her husband, their father, Henry II. As this began to prove difficult, I expanded the topic quite a lot by choosing to write about her and the relationships she had in her life in general. Finally, as I began to write, I realized that the best content and structure was that which depicted facets of her life which could contract and build toward the Rebellion of 1173 to 1174 as the climax to, and end of, a natural progression and depiction. As a natural side-effect, perhaps the production could imply the effects of English and French history as inspired by Eleanor of Aquitaine.

In creating and clarifying my topic, I read extensively on the history and culture of the Angevins and Plantagenets, and I read intensively on Eleanor and her many and complex familial relations. As I was familiarizing myself with the history, historiography, and blatant mythologization of Eleanor, I was doing the same with medieval music and lyric. While researching and taking notes which would contribute to both the creative project, both content and structure, and the artist statement and explanation, I would listen to medieval music, traditional music, folk rock, and film scores to organize my thoughts around and set the tone for the covered historical period and musical choices. Conversely, I would not listen to music during musical and lyrical composition to be sure that I was creating well-blended, original music.

Likewise, the process of writing itself took a rather avant-garde approach as inspiration for different parts would occur somewhat sporadically. Often, the spells of

most intense productivity would be spurred by work on another song or portion of the folk opera before eventually returning to the initial piece. Still, some order emerged in the writing process. Specific historical facts and opinions were first put into song outlines, allowing for the truths to be naturally integrated into the lyrics and cited in the footnotes. In some cases, like *Kingdom Expanded*, the lyrics were written first as the wealth of information lent itself easily to writing. In other cases, like *Fact and Fantasy*, the music was written first because a melody and harmonies emerged. In a few cases, like *The Rebellion of 1173-74: Part Two*, both lyrics and music were composed concurrently as the madrigal form demanded simultaneous growth.

In characterization, while there were several descriptions of individuals, there were not many description of their personal interactions from which to ascertain a full picture. As such, I had to make several assumptions in creative choices, particularly for Eleanor. For this portion, then, I contributed to the mythologization of Eleanor in terms of personality, creating her as close to how I envisioned her. For example, I made the choice that Eleanor and Henry must, throughout the project, treat each other as equals of intelligence, passion, danger, attractiveness, and "neither [must give] place to the other in intelligence or wit."<sup>22</sup> Additionally, I had to shift my focus from otherwise dominating characters in order to emphasize Eleanor as the focus. For example, Richard I – remembered even now as his epithet, "Lionheart," more than his regnal name – would, in many other stories, be the protagonist and main character, but this story is not about him. Instead, it is about the woman responsible for his existence, both as person and king, who demanded respect from all those who would know her.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 8.

While creating a historically-accurate medieval folk opera is a significant undertaking in and of itself, the creative work itself needed to be distinctly scholarly as well. As such, it required a central, academic argument. Written in verse at the end of the first, introductory song, the thesis statement to the project is this: Eleanor's background of education, governance, and relationships informed her choice to rebel with her sons against the king of England, her husband and their father, Henry II.

This argument is supported by several premises. The first is that of education in a manner which goes quite against modern perceptions and preconceptions of the Medieval Period as a whole. In the Twelfth Century, it was not unheard of in aristocratic families for women to be educated, but some women were more educated than others. One particular example of this is a female poet who was a contemporary of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Marie de France, female writer of *lais* and likely related to the court of Henry II, had an impressive intellectual background. She knew Latin quite thoroughly, translating multiple stories.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, she demonstrated her background understanding of classical culture, traditional and folk tales, and "contemporary vernacular literature."<sup>24</sup>

This knowledge of literature, culture, traditions, and meanings is that which is taught to allow the person being taught to have an intentionally intellectual background. While education of women to this degree was not frequent, it was not an impossibility as modern myths of the period often convey. Even for women who did not have the access to such advanced education, they were expected to have at least basic levels thereof. This is because women were expected to raise their children, meaning that sons' first exposure

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<sup>23</sup> Emanuel J. Mickel, *Marie de France* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974): 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

to education had to come from their mother.<sup>25</sup> In this logic, then, the mothers had to have some knowledge to pass on and must have acquired some form of at least basic education to pass the basics required for governance and authority to the boys who would become the ruling men.

Because of her father and his emphasis on her inheriting his land after his passing and possessing the ability to rule it, Eleanor was likely educated to the degree of Marie de France, if not more. As such, when she later issued and evaluated the writings which applied to her territories, she could interpret their meanings and intentions. Moreover, it influenced her ability to maintain control of her land through her two marriages and four sons, and allowed her the skill to raise Richard in particular to be the very model of chivalry. Within the project, this is made clear through her interactions, verbal sparring, and role as conspirator.

Just as some aristocratic Medieval women, like Eleanor, had a background in education, some also had a background which leant itself to governance. Even among non-aristocratic women, wives and mothers were expected to have the knowledge and fortitude to take care of her home – defending it, if necessary – when their husbands and sons were away. While, for some, this related directly to the house and home, for those whose relations were ruling men, this translated to tending to their collective domain. While only mentioned in passing by period sources, women were recorded as “holding cities under siege or directing military operations against troublesome subordinates” when the men who would traditionally do so were inaccessible or indisposed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, “The Power of Women Through the Family in the Middle Ages,” special issue, *Feminist Studies* 1, no. ¾ (1973): 133.

<sup>26</sup> McNamara and Wemple, “The Power,” 133.

Eleanor was guaranteed to inherit her own land by her father, William X, Duke of Aquitaine, and was obviously educated on how to keep her claim throughout two marriages to both King Louis VII of France and King Henry II of England. She is recorded as having issued her own writs and decrees, or *acta* as queen. Several of these were issued while her sons and husband were away – whether the purpose of their journey was for political reasons or conquest – and she acted as regent in their collective stead, overseeing the confusing mass of jurisdictions that arose between her, Henry the Young King, Richard, and Henry II.<sup>27</sup> Even for her own land, however, records – unclear though they may be – indicate that the men in her life may have been required to obtain her assent to issue *acta* which applied to her hereditary lands, which extended from the Loire River, to the Atlantic Ocean, to the Pyrenees Mountains.<sup>28</sup> Within the creative project, her abilities in this area are most well shown in *Kingdom Expanded*, as well as in songs of the rebellion itself.

Relationships, fostering and maintaining, have been an important part of womanhood for centuries. While Eleanor of Aquitaine is often known for her qualities which some could consider masculine, whether these conceptions are based in fact or assumption, she was able to use the skills expected of her as a woman to achieve her goals. While her educational and governmental abilities gave her clear background in ruling, the relationships she fostered throughout her life enhanced these skills and allowed her the connections she needed during the eighteen months of rebellion in 1173 to 1174.

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<sup>27</sup> Richardson, “Letters and Charters,” 193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

Many of her influential relationships, particularly during the rebellion, were those connected to her in some familial way. Both political and personal reasons seem to dominate the involvement of Henry II – a man known as a great king but terrible husband and father. The king against whom the rebellion was waged, there were many reasons why their initially strong, sensible, and successful marriage devolved into infidelity and war. Some scholars indicate that a primary reason for their very public conflict was Henry II's affair with Rosamund Clifford.<sup>29</sup> While this might have fueled her personal passion and investment, spurring the tension into action, there were several administrative differences between the two, primarily stemming from Eleanor's desire to act as a regent and Henry's personal need for control. Some contemporaries argued, for religious reasons, that his general unhappiness in life was because he married the divorced Eleanor.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the reason, Eleanor had far more reasons to sympathize with the wishes of her sons than with her husband.<sup>31</sup>

Eleanor was an intense influence in her sons' lives. While later in their lives this influence expressed itself in their willingness to rebel against their father, both with and without her direct influence, her influence earlier on left its mark in its emphasis on chivalry, cunning, and the arts, as well as on governing the lands promised each son. Richard in particular was her favorite. A man who would have otherwise lived for war and eschewed an administrative position, Richard became "a very model of chivalry" because of his mother, refining his softer, artistic skills as well as his rougher, aggressive

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<sup>29</sup> Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, *1215: The Year of Magna Carta* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 85.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075-1225* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 630.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas M. Jones, "The Generation Gap of 1173-74: The War Between the Two Henrys," *Albion A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 5, no. 3/4, 32.

abilities.<sup>32</sup> Though Henry was not her favorite, son, she took “her motherly role to its extreme, backing her rebellious sons against their father” when Henry, the Young King, believed he was not given enough responsibilities or authorities over the lands where he was designated regent.<sup>33</sup> While sons rebelled comparatively often against their fathers during this period in history, the rebellion of a wife was extraordinary; Eleanor must have been extremely angry – whether about Henry II’s mistress, political frustration, or another reason – to side with her sons against her husband, the king.<sup>34</sup> As such, her relationship with her sons was not simply that of a mother, but as a fellow conspirator. Through her sons, she developed a connection that would allow her to extend her power and influence in a broader manner.

Before her marriage to, and children with, Henry II, Eleanor was married to Louis VII of France. A single woman in possession of a vast inheritance, Eleanor was in want of a husband as a legal and unification would prevent her from becoming a target of scheming and potential kidnapping, and Louis would acquire territory to rule more directly as Eleanor inheritance was equal to approximately half of France. While strategic, their marriage was destined to fail. Eleanor had eyes for handsome men – not her husband – and often felt as if she had married a monk.<sup>35</sup> As such, there was little affection between Louis VII and Eleanor. As some religious scholars of the time who claimed that sex between spouses who had “no affection for each other” was a type of sexual sin or adultery, the couple could invoke another pretense to end their marriage

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<sup>32</sup> Mary McAuliffe, *Clash of Crowns: William the Conqueror, Richard Lionheart, and Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Story of Bloodshed, Betrayal, and Revenge* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 7; Nigel Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 20.

<sup>33</sup> Bartlett, *England Under*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Danziger and Gillingham, *1215*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

while the underlying interpersonal, political turmoil shaped their desires.<sup>36</sup> In their 14-year marriage, they had two daughters, but no sons, and their marriage only lasted that long because Eleanor held so much land and, due to the stipulations by her father and movement of the period, Louis would lose the land upon their divorce.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, he could not just repudiate Eleanor as she held certain notoriety, status, and respect. As a result, they were divorced, though the public explanation and reasoning for the divorce was consanguinity instead of the core problems of their relationship. While not impossible for a couple to divorce during this time, it was rare – made rarer by the fact that the divorce was spurred by Eleanor, not by her husband.

Her alliance with her sons, though key for the core of the rebellion, required support from external sources with further resources. As the rebellion was against Henry II, Eleanor enlisted the help of her former husband, Louis VII. While this alliance might first sound strange, their marriage was, to generalize, loveless and apathetic, existing only because of its strategic nature to both parties. This more professional relationship was likewise built upon strategy. To be successful against Henry II, Eleanor and company had to create a division in the kingdom – a task Louis VII, along with lords throughout France and Scotland with whom Eleanor and her sons had come to an accord, was perfectly willing to undertake.<sup>38</sup> Within the creative project, Eleanor interacts with several other people, but she also has several solo moments. As such, this represents her tactical use of relationships as resources to achieve her own ends.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> McAuliffe, *Clash of Crowns*, 11-12.



Through using her background of education, governance, and relationships as resources, Eleanor was able to inspire rebellion, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, against Henry II. While this indicates that she was a woman ahead of her time in some ways, such as leading a rebellion, she was able to do so through means accessible to those of her station, though perhaps not typically all at once. While Eleanor of Aquitaine might be considered a proto-feminist icon for her actions by some, this should not be considered her defining characteristic. Instead, she was a determined strategist able to use the resources available to her to enhance her standing and grow in power and influence throughout her life.

Conceptualized on a study abroad trip and realized over an academic year, “Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Musical Exploration” makes historical truth accessible to a wider audience, combats forces of pure mythologization, allows a blend of influences to converge into a unified whole, and serves as a vehicle for an oft forgotten or mythologized event in English history. While a medieval folk opera might be an unconventional method of conveying a scholarly argument, it is an innovative way to mediate and market a historically-accurate artwork to the public. Having already intrigued both history buffs and those who would avoid historical discussion, this work could, at least among a few individuals, increase knowledge, interest, and understanding of Eleanor, the rebellion, and – perhaps – the medieval period.

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